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Tribune's Opinion

The president's devious plot idea

We've voiced our suspicions about the nuclear freeze movement already. A popular mandate to freeze the production of nuclear arms raises questions about how to accomplish the goal and does little more than express the wishes of virtually everyone: That it would nice if we didn't have nuclear weapons. Beyond that the nuclear freeze movement is long on wishes and short on means to attain them.

Having said that, we hasten to add that President Reagan, speaking this week in Columbus, Ohio, seemed to suggest old-time McCarthyism when he insinuated that the nuclear freeze movement is being manipulated by people whose real motive is to weaken the military abilities of the United States. Demonstrations are inspired not by "sincere, honest people who want peace, but by some who want a weakening of America, and so are manipulating many honest and sincere people," the president said.

Is that so? We'd like a more detailed explanation, if it is. Does the president suggest that the popularity of the nuclear freeze movement somehow is the work of communist plotters who know how to inspire and use popular opinion to the military advantage of the Soviet Union? Does that further suggest that not liking nuclear weapons is somehow buying into "commie" thinking, unpatriotic and inevitably destructive of the American way?

The president is certainly privy to much more information than we. Perhaps the CIA or some other operationally clandestine government agency has turned up the convincing evidence that dislike of nuclear weapons and fear of their use is a cleverly administered communist plot.

But we doubt it. Common sense suggests otherwise. Nuclear weapons aren't liked because they have the capability of blowing us to smithereens. Nothing communist about that. The nuclear freeze movement, we believe, raises serious questions about how to achieve its stated goal. But there's certainly much more to be revealed before those of us who've raised questions about the freeze movement will side with the president in suggesting that it's all a devious plot that's being cleverly manipulated to the destruction of the United States.